United Nations S/2012/740

Security Council

Distr.: General
11 October 2012

Original: English

Letter dated 4 October 2012 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Upon instructions from my Government, I have the honour to transmit herewith (see annex) the response of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic concerning the report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict (A/66/782-S/2012/261).

It would be highly appreciated if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Bashar **Ja'afari**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

12-54378 (E) 171012 181012

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 4 October 2012 from the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

[Original: Arabic]

Response of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic to the paragraphs concerning children in Syria included in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Children and armed conflict"

It was with deep concern that we examined the Secretary-General's report entitled "Children and armed conflict" (A/66/782-S/2012/261), which contains erroneous information provided by the outgoing Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy.

The Syrian Arab Republic regrets the unsound and unprofessional nature of the report, which was drafted with subjective motives in order to denigrate Syria and call into question its standing and compliance with its international undertakings to protect children and prevent violence against them in armed conflict. The Syrian Government therefore rejects all the allegations which the report levels at my country, Syria. It deplores the politicization of that vital humanitarian issue, which is of particular relevance to the safety of Syria's children.

My Government is deeply concerned that, in considering the situation in Syria, the Special Representative has plainly overstepped her mandate under the relevant Security Council resolutions. In several paragraphs, the drafters of the report went beyond the time period under consideration, raising questions about their motives. Furthermore, they failed to back up the information in the report with evidence, data or facts. Instead, they chose to rely on allegations put forward by a media and propaganda source opposed to Syria and its people, rather than take into consideration the views of the Syrian Government. Those views have, since the crisis began, been set out repeatedly in scores of letters and reports that the Government has submitted through the Permanent Mission in New York to, among others, the Secretary-General, the President and members of the Security Council and the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. Those documents contain substantiated information on the extent to which civilians in Syria and, in particular, children, are the targets of the killing and destruction that are the work of armed terrorist groups armed and funded from abroad.

The Syrian Arab Government affirms that the claims made in the paragraphs on Syria are unsubstantiated and fraudulent. The sources are described in the report as eyewitnesses, but repeated references make it clear that they are either individuals avoiding military or public service, or civilians who support the armed opposition. In view of their obvious interest in distorting the facts and misleading the international community, their veracity must be open to question. It is no secret that their purpose is to sully the image of the Government, law enforcement forces and Army, which are doing their duty by keeping Syrian civilians safe and secure from the armed groups that have been committing acts of terrorism for the last year and a half. There is also a third category of eyewitnesses, namely, Syrian refugees, most of whom were forced to leave the country by threats to them and their families from terrorist groups. In what appears to be a leitmotiv for the drafters, nearly every

paragraph refers to "Government forces, including the Syrian Armed Forces, the intelligence forces and the Shabbiha militia". The Special Representative has clearly taken the phrase from notorious media and propaganda sources whose anti-Syrian agenda is plain to everyone. It is used indiscriminately by the armed opposition for obvious purposes, in order to misinform and to deflect allegations.

The drafters persistently hold the security and military services in Syria fully responsible for the violence perpetrated against children. They accuse those agencies of bombarding schools and killing and maiming children. In so doing, they deliberately ignore dozens of other political and media reports, as well as the accounts of well-known non-governmental actors, which show that armed terrorist groups have recruited children, obliging them to bear arms, take part in terrorist actions, kill, and sabotage public and private property at the behest of the leaders of the armed groups. Even the report of the Secretary-General has been unable to deny "credible allegations of the recruitment (...) of children by armed opposition". The most recent report of the independent international commission of inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic indicates that anti-Government armed groups used children under the age of 18 as fighters and in such support roles as assisting medical evacuations or as couriers for armed groups.

The Syrian Arab Republic is a party not only to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, but also to its 2003 Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We have been and remain committed to our obligations under those instruments.

We should have liked the former Special Representative to have included, in the section on Syria, information regarding the actions of the armed terrorist groups that are supported and funded from abroad. As documented in the reports of the United Nations Children's Fund, those actions include attacks on health centres and arson attacks on and the looting and destruction of over 2,070 schools and kindergartens.

The armed terrorist groups have targeted all components of the health sector, including 26 national hospitals that have been destroyed, set on fire and looted. Six have been rendered inoperable. Those who are unaware of the fact should know that the armed terrorist groups boasted in the media that on 3 September 2012, they had blown up the Qusayr hospital, in Homs governorate, when all the patients, including women and children, were still inside. A total of 103 health centres have been targeted and 12 put out of commission. More than 232 emergency vehicles that provided supplies and logistical support to hospitals and health centres have been put out of service.

There is documented evidence that armed terrorist groups have deliberately attacked educational institutions and teachers in Syria. Families have been directly and indirectly threatened in order to deter them from sending their children to school; explosive devices have been detonated within or in the vicinity of schools; and schools have been deliberately targeted by missiles. With the start of the new school year in Damascus, such incidents are recurring repeatedly.

One recent example of the way in which the armed terrorist groups target public property and school buildings and terrorize the students in order to prevent them from continuing their education is the attack that was carried out in the morning of 2 October 2012 by an armed terrorist group against the preparatory

school in the village of Buraq in the Al Laja area that lies in the countryside north of Dar'a. With a view to terrorizing the students and teachers, armed men opened fire and abducted Hisham Khalid al-Hilal, a student from year eight and the son of the sheikh of the Jamalat tribe, who is well known for his involvement in national reconciliation efforts. On the morning of the same day, another armed terrorist group attacked the Jasim business secondary school and set light to 600 litres of gas oil that they had discharged from the heating supplies. Several classrooms were destroyed.

It is the armed terrorist groups that are violating the rights of the child in Syria and obstructing the evacuation of the injured and sick, children and disabled persons from certain quarters where they are held hostage, as happened in the city of Homs in the presence of representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross. As a gift to the schoolchildren on the first day of the current academic year an armed terrorist group bombarded a primary school in Rif Dimashq, wounding scores of children. We hear none of those who defend childhood and the right to education talking about that incident and are not surprised when, as usual, certain parties accuse the law enforcement forces of having carried it out.

Unfortunately, what we have claimed was exactly what took place when the Special Representative of the Secretary-General made her opening statement to the Security Council meeting that was held on 19 September 2012. In that statement, she said that she had requested the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to convey to Syrian Government forces an appeal to spare schools. While the Special Representative made no mention in her statement of the response of the Permanent Representative to her appeal, we should like to reaffirm what we have set forth above with regard to the real situation in Syria and, in particular, the status of schools in the country. We should also like to draw her attention to the outcome of the fifth Syrian Humanitarian Forum which was held in Geneva on 7 September 2012 under the auspices of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Forum participants issued a presidential statement, of which the third paragraph stated:

> The Regional Humanitarian Coordinator gave a briefing on the rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation resulting from the recent escalation of violence. He said that the local community's ability to support people who have fled their homes had been largely exhausted. Of the 1.2 million people displaced, more than 1 million were sheltering in 470 schools and other public buildings. The need to find alternative shelter was urgent, particularly as the new school term was scheduled to start on 16 September 2012.

The OCHA Coordinator in Damascus explains and confirms that schools in Syria are used as refuges for internally displaced families, not as bases for Government military forces. This is testimony from the United Nations itself!

Moreover, has the Special Representative not seen the reports and documents on the phenomenon that is considered permissible by some in Arab countries, namely, the vulgarly so-called "licit sexual jihad"? Those who consider this form of "jihad" permissible select from the Syrian refugee camps in Turkey and Jordan Syrian girl children aged between 14 and 16 years whom they marry for a paltry sum of money. Has the Special Representative also failed to look into the 86 documented cases of rape that have taken place in Turkish refugee camps, where Turkish guards have raped Syrian refugee women?

Furthermore, those who wrote the report completely ignored the impact on Syrian children of the illegal, unilateral economic sanctions. It is children who are primarily adversely affected by those sanctions and the challenges they pose to the various sectors and, in particular, the health sector. The difficulty of exchanging money that has ensued from the embargo placed on national banks has impacted the import of children's vaccines and the availability of medication, raised the cost of medical equipment and made supplies thereof unreliable. Spare parts necessary for maintenance are also unavailable, making it difficult to provide essential services and limiting prospects for development.

The Syrian Government finds it truly deplorable that eight paragraphs in the report should have been devoted to a discussion of the Syrian Arab Republic and that absolutely no reference should have been made to the suffering of Syrian children under the yoke of the Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan, which has been occupied for decades. Those children suffer on a daily basis from the crimes of the Israeli occupation and the daily violations of their most basic rights to life, education, food and water, quite apart from the continuous suffering caused by the planting in the occupied Golan by Israel of all types of lethal mines and cluster bombs. A total of 202 Syrian children have been killed by those mines, while a further 329 have been permanently disabled thereby. Over the years, we have on dozens of occasions drawn Ms. Coomaraswamy's attention to the need to give this matter the attention it deserves in her reports, but she has failed to do so.

We were also surprised to find that the report of the Secretary-General's Special Representative made no reference to the situation of the Palestinian children in the occupied territories that is the result of the Israeli occupation. We have no option here but to remind the Special Representative that, since 29 September 2000, Israel has killed 1,500 Palestinian children; and that today happens to be the thirtieth anniversary of the massacre of innocent Palestinian children and women in Sabra and Shatila that was carried out in Beirut in 1982 by Israel and its Lebanese agents. It may also be appropriate to mention all the Iraqi, Libyan and Yemeni children who have died as a result of the military intervention of NATO forces, either on the ground or by means of drones.

The Syrian Government affirms its right to protect its citizens. On the basis of its respect for the moral role of the Security Council, and in keeping with the Charter of the United Nations, my country once more calls upon all members of the Security Council, in accordance with counter-terrorism-related Security Council resolutions, to bring pressure to bear on the Arab, regional and international States that are financing the terrorism in Syria to halt their support for the terrorist groups and to stop arming and funding them and facilitating their operations. It also calls for the immoral and illegal nature of the unilateral sanctions that have been imposed on Syria to be exposed.